"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin

Published by The Christian Rural Fellowship, Room 1111, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Number 93 June, 1944

HOLBROOK LIBRARY PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

The War and Rural Reconstruction in China

By Frank Wilson Price*

China's "farmers of forty centuries" face a new era in their history. Today they bear the brunt of war, fighting on a hundred fronts, producing food in the vast hinterland, defending the freedom of their country. But they are also gaining for themselves new and unexpected freedoms. They are beginning to feel their power and realize their birthright.

Since seventy out of a hundred Chinese families are agricultural families and since more than eighty per cent of the population lives outside of urban centers, national reconstruction cannot but be largely rural reconstruction. The term covers all kinds of agricultural and technical improvements: better seeds and fertilizers, improved tools and increased irrigation, eradication of plant and animal diseases, larger production, more home industries. But it is not limited to material or economic benefits for the farmer and his community. The goals of rural reconstruction today are also good government, justice for land owner and tenant alike, equalization of educational and health services, wider extension of democracy, better rural homes and a finer, happier rural society.

China's rural reconstruction movement was born in World War I, grew rapidly through turbulent years of civil war and natural calamity, became a great national cause in the decade of unification and progress after 1927, and is receiving a remarkable impetus from the present War of Resistance.

Twenty-five years ago, James Yen and some of his associates serving with the Chinese Labor Corps Y.M.C.A. in France caught a vision of the possibilities of the illiterate Chinese coolie--his bitterness (k'u) and his strength (lih). They returned to China as pioneers in mass education and other stirring social reforms. All the needs and problems of rural life, accentuated by internal strife, widespread poverty and banditry, and the fetters that still limited China's independence, became a vehement challenge to the scientific knowledge and social idealism of the intellectual class. One study and experiment stimulated another. Agricultural colleges

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and schools multiplied. Rural service centers sprung up. Rural churches assumed a new importance. Students rediscovered their own villages.

Great Rural Awakening

Then came the first large-scale awakening of the masses in 1926-1927, with "Livelihood"--one of Dr. Sun Yat-sen's "Three People's Principles"--as one of the revolutionary slogans. The leaven was at work. By 1932 the National Government, inspired by hundreds of scattered rural projects, launched its own program of rural reconstruction. New bureaus and agencies were formed, ambitious plans were laid out, each province started experimental hsien (counties), the banks began to supply rural credit at reasonable rates of interest, and workers in the field of rural reconstruction were consolidating their forces, meeting in national conferences and working out a unified approach to basic rural problems. A pattern for the movement was beginning to emerge. In the spring of 1937 five universities in North China and in Nanking formed the North China Council of Rural Reconstruction for concerted scientific study and effort.

"At this very hour," says one Chinese writer, "when the future seemed to hold the greatest promise for rural reconstruction, the present war burst upon us... Of all losses sustained by the Chinese, few are more tragic than this disruption of the rural reconstruction movement."

And yet the gains, I believe, have more than offset the losses. First, the war has given the farmer a new standing in society and in the life of the nation. His contribution to national defense and production is increasingly recognized and appreciated. The farmer's income has kept pace with the cost of living to a far greater degree than the income of the intellectual and professional classes. The result of this silent social revolution is a growing self-consciousness in the farming class, a new sense of dignity and strength. This is shared by the farmer's wife and children. Agriculture has always been a respectable vocation; today it is honored and the nation is ready to do far more than it has ever done for its toilers of the soil. The farmer himself is becoming central in plans for rural betterment.

Effects of the War

Again, the war has driven thousands of governmental, educational, professional and industrial leaders into the inner provinces and into the villages. Seeds of new ideas have been scattered far and wide. Rural problems have become the object of extensive and intensive research. Science had been applied to agriculture for some time in the Occident and recently in China. The war has brought together the scientist and the farmer, the college professor and the peasant, the government official and the man with the hoe, in new ways that enhance mutual respect. From the privileged intellectual class are coming more and more young men and women determined not only to serve their rural brothers and sisters but also to fight for their fundamental rights and to free them from exploitation by selfish interests. This trend is profoundly significant for rural reconstruction.

The twenty years of accumulated experience in rural work before the war have not been lost but are channeled into new and fertile fields. The leadership of the rural reconstruction movement is not as concentrated as it was before the war but its contribution is over a wider area and its influence reaches farther. There are fewer mass education texts and readers, because of difficulties and cost of printing but there is more mass education and the masses are reading more than ever. The philosophy of the rural movement is maturing through constant interchange of valuable thinking and experimentation. In 1939 a Rural Reconstruction Association

A few examples of the influence of non-government and private effort may be given. During its brief history the Tsining field center of the North China Council of Rural Reconstruction was productive of many valuable ideas and methods which the leaders are now applying in Free China. The Christian Rural Service Station at Lichwan, Kiangsi, begun as an inter-church project in 1935, has been a helpful demonstration for all China. The rural experiments or service centers of many private institutions such as Yenching, Cheeloo, Nanking, Foochow, Nankai Universities and of the Nanking Theological Seminary, and the rural work done by the Y.W.C.A. and Y.M.C.A. in selected communities, made a contribution before the war and their value is being conserved in new ventures in Free China. Hundreds of little country churches are proving to be light and leaven in their environment, and are helping to build the moral and spiritual foundations for the new rural civilization. Rural pastors with the special training that many are now receiving for their special work have an opportunity to become unofficial but trusted and loved community leaders or rather servants. Primary school teachers with a genuine love of the villages and village folk are doing much outside of their regular teaching work to improve community life. Young men and women in their late 'teens and twenties are taking a much more active part in community affairs and national causes than did their parents at this age. They are the active rural citizens, the local community leaders of tomorrow. Recently I visited a village where a young men's athletic organization, locally sponsored, is interesting a large number in wholesome games and is creating a better social atmosphere.

Rural Life and Democracy

Is the rural reconstruction movement furthering democracy? Yes. That the Government may consolidate its own position at the expense of the rural masses, from which it is drawing large armies and food supplies, is a danger not to be minimized. But we may say also that a Government which is extending both elementary and adult education as rapidly as possible and which is steadily giving more power to national, provincial and local people's councils, is hardly moving toward fascism. The Government cannot ignore the inherited and ineradicable democracy of Chinese village life nor, if it is wise, will it neglect the tremendous support for its own more liberal policies and for democratic advance which the rural masses can give. I have heard many government officials, Generalissimo Chiang, and heads of ministries in Chungking, provincial governors and county magistrates, express deep and even passionate concern for the farmer himself and a determined purpose that the farmer shall enjoy a full share in the remaking of his community and in the control of his government.

Land reforms are needed and the Government is committed to them. Initial steps are being taken to give all farmers the chance to own and till their own land. The new social and economic system will probably be a middle road discovered by the traditional Chinese genius for the "golden mean," somewhere between complete state control of agriculture and socialization of the land on the one hand and laissez faire individualism on the other. It will be a system worked out to suit China's own history, spirit and needs, rather than one patterned wholly upon any system of the West. The liberal intellectuals in the rural reconstruction movement will fight, I believe, against any exploitation of the farmer and for the realization of his democratic rights. And the farmer himself, with the keener political consciousness and stronger economic security which the war has brought him, will not be satisfied with anything less than a just social order as part of the liberated new China.

new and varied rural organizations, the goal of better production and distribution and of a richer rural civilization--these things all call for educational change. A type of education better suited to rural needs and more fruitful in abundant rural living is being demanded in many quarters. In village primary schools and rural normal schools, in colleges of agriculture and other schools of higher learning that look beyond their campus walls to the farmsteads beyond, one can feel the stirrings of desire for better teaching, teaching that will furnish rural communities with thinkers, scientists, social engineers and practical field workers, as well as teaching that will prepare the rural folk themselves to master their environment and build a better rural society.

The impact of science upon rural life and the contribution of science to rural reconstruction may be observed not only in research done on rural problems and the introduction here and there of scientific agricultural methods, but also in the new and significant relation between agriculture and industry. The dependence of Chinese industry now and in the future upon agricultural products and upon improvement and diversification of agriculture together with large-scale reforestation is fully apparent. More interesting and important in many ways is the dispersion of small industries during the war away from the large cities, the organization of mobile industrial units behind the lines and the introduction of new or improved industries and crafts into rural homes. This has drawn the attention, both of government and social leaders and also of farmers, to the benefits of an agricultural-industrial economy. Unless agriculture and industry meet and work together China cannot hope to raise appreciably the standard of living of its large agrarian population upon a limited amount of tillable land. The trend toward rural industries, so greatly accelerated by the war, gives hope that China in her future development may be able to avoid the evils both of city slums and of rural poverty. The war is painting the outlines of the post-war rural society that China needs: fewer farmers tilling more land with improved tools and better seed, industries drawing off surplus farm labor, industrial opportunities for other farm labor in slack seasons, more rapid and less expensive methods of distribution--of foodstuffs to consumers and necessary supplies to farmers--more efficient utilization of land and labor for the good of both the rural and city populations.

Local Initiative Important

The Government's ambitious program of agricultural improvement and rural welfare does not lessen the need for local initiative and private effort. Rural leaders appreciate that full cooperation between government, social and private agencies is necessary if the goals of rural reconstruction are to be reached. Small-scale experiments wisely planned and carried through are often exceedingly fruitful in new ideas and methods. Rural welfare centers, student service teams in vacations, the outreach of colleges and middle schools into rural communities, philanthropic and religious organizations including Christian rural churches, and plans and activities sponsored by the community itself, all have an important place. Rural reconstruction is too complex and involves too many psychological and spiritual factors in addition to material and social ones to depend entirely upon direction from above. Not only must the right conditions for rural progress be provided with government help but the rich potentialities of rural people and rural communities must be released. Initiative, freedom, spontaneity and the earnest efforts of farmers and farm homes themselves are the soil and atmosphere necessary to growth of rural culture. China has always had a rural culture and it will come to flower in the new era if rural folk are encouraged to express their own ideas and feelings through the medium of song, drama, art, social life and religion. The philosophers of the rural reconstruction movement are stressing even more today reconstruction from the bottom up to supplement what the Government has done and is doing from the top down.

was formed with a selected membership of highly qualified specialists. Only those who are carrying on some outstanding research or service are eligible.

Aid to Farmers

Economic aid for the farmer and the farming community has been an outstanding development during the war years. Through a rapidly growing number of rural credit cooperatives much money has been pumped into the villages to strengthen the rural economy and stimulate greater agricultural production. While the chief function of these societies has been loaning money at lower rates of interest rather than promotion of economic cooperation, yet the social by-products of the movement are not unimportant. The organization of farmers around common interests is a step toward economic democracy and the larger goals of rural reconstruction. Aid to farmers includes loans of seeds, fertilizers, animals and tools.

The interest of the National Government in all phases of rural welfare has been much intensified by the war. Methods learned from the experiences of scattered counties have been extended to whole provinces such as Hunan and Kiangsi. A Ministry of Agriculture was established in 1941, headed now by Shen Hung-lieh, former mayor of Tsingtao. Under this ministry are the extension stations and provincial institutes for agricultural improvement which are beginning to serve more and more counties and rural neighborhoods. National, provincial and local governments all have some departments or agencies concerned with the social welfare of the rural community. Kiangsi Province has been a pioneer in government service to women. Its provincial women's bureau sends out hundreds of women representatives to teach mothers and young girls and to raise the standards of rural home life. County magistrates and officers who come into daily contact with the farming population are now receiving special training in all the provinces, through longer or shorter institutes. The average magistrate today is a younger man, better prepared for his complex task, more energetic, efficient, responsible and honest than his predecessors. He is expected to spend half his time on inspection trips throughout his county. If he is like the Generalissimo's son, Ching-kuo, magistrate of Kanhsien, Kiangsi, he travels largely on foot and sets an example of simple living and hard work to all his staff.

The main effort of the Chinese Government in rural rebuilding is focussed upon the "new hsien system." This system calls for reforms in administration, education, public health and defense organization, and the training of the people in democracy. Hsien councils are to be elected by the people. The greatest obstacles to the complete carrying out of this laudable scheme are the lack of sufficiently educated, trustworthy leaders in each community, and the opposition of selfish, vested interests and local bosses. But the Government is winning more and more the confidence of the farming class and with the cooperation of the best farmers should be able to carry through many reforms even before the war is ended. In the war zones and the guerrilla areas the farming population cooperates closely with the national armies. Even in occupied territory the Chinese Government can count upon the loyal aid of almost every peasant who is out of sight of enemy guards and guns. Government-appointed magistrates still function in the majority of occupied hsien, a few li (one third of a mile) distant from the enemy garrisons.

A New Rural Society

The effects of the war upon the old rural society, the thrust of the farming class into swift currents of new national life, the urgent need for rural leaders, the demand for scientific knowledge of rural needs and a more scientific approach to rural reconstruction, the loosening of old customs and the emergence of

The Farmer's Future

From this appraisal of rural reconstruction in the past two decades and during the yeasty years of war our thoughts and hopes turn to the future. What facts and trends today help us to envisage the morrow? Millions of soldiers from the farms will return some day to their homes. Many will continue farming, many will go into industry or government projects. Public works, railways, roads, the development of water power, transportation and new factories will absorb a large number. Agriculture will become more scientific, land utilization will be more effective, there will be a larger measure of state planning and supervision in rural enterprises. Land reforms, rural industries and the decreasing percentage of population engaged in agriculture will gradually raise the rural standard of living. Rural social life will become richer and more meaningful as it has become in America and Canada. Local government will attract an increasing number of talented and patriotic youth into public service. These are reasonable hopes and expectations--when China and the democracies win.

We cannot shut our eyes to darker possibilities: a severe agricultural depression following a protracted war, the danger of class struggle, attempts--which would certainly fail in the end--at regimentation of the rural masses, and if by some tragic misfortune Japan's hold on China should be tightened rather than loosened, a great land and people, that ought to be free, bled white by rapacious invaders.

But today hope surges in our hearts. We are confident that rural reconstruction, spurred on by the vicissitudes of these war years, will achieve yet greater results after the war, and that the colorful pattern of rural life and civilization evolved in China will be a valuable contribution to all mankind. Then rural reconstruction, which is yet in its infancy, will not be a movement simply for the farmers but also of them and by them, and China will help to usher in a new era for the vast agricultural population of her own nation and of the world.

PRINTED IN U.S.A.